

scholarship, much of which challenges the primacy of the explanatory power of capitalism. A more rigorous analysis of the interplay between economic and cultural forces holds more promise for the understanding and resolution of educational inequity in our society than does a further reliance on a mechanistic and outdated theoretical model.

—David B. Bills  
University of Iowa

**Marjorie Pryse and Hortense J. Spillers, eds. *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Traditions*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) 263 pp., \$29.95; \$10.95 paper.**

The centrality of black women's fiction writers may have been a fact before the publication of Pryse's and Spiller's compilation, but this critical anthology establishes such fiction as a main literary current of late 20th century American literature. The writers included do more than enlighten; they exorcise racist and sexist stereotypes and restore many authors to rightful places of recognition where male critics (black and white) failed to place them.

Through their able scholarship, the writers underline the pressing need for re-examining the "canon-ization" process of the academic and publishing establishments. The work demonstrates a fine organization. Pryse's excellent introduction clarifies the over-all approach, providing new readers with exciting points of departure for a reading or a re-reading of these fictionalists. The essays make readers and critics alike think carefully about avoiding incorrect interpretations because of inadequate research or biased mindsets.

The chronological and topical arrangements of the essays make clear the tradition of these writers, "metaphorical conjure women," who through the magic of their creations reveal their searches for self-understanding. As Pryse points out, as "mediums," they enable readers and themselves to "recognize their common literary ancestors," and to see themselves as "a community of inheritors." The essays' arrangement shows the significance and the potential impact of this group of writers.

Early essays examine the work of the foremothers. Frances Smith Foster points up the distinct contributions of early Afro-American female autobiographers such as Janine Lee, Nancy Prince, and Harriet E. Wilson, all of whom attacked in different ways sexism and racism in their self-portraits which are not stereotypes of either the "true woman" or the "victimized slave woman."

Minrose C. Gwin's examination of the work of Harriet Jacob and Elizabeth Keckley highlights their victimizations and shows how their

writings re-ordered their experience, helping them to "create themselves anew." Claudia Tate's essay on Pauline Hopkins and Deborah McDowell's on Jessie Redman Fauset justifiably rescue these two artists from obscurity where they were placed by biased critics. Feminine perceptions and new readings demonstrate how Hopkins meant her work to be an effort toward racial improvement and how Fauset clearly showed how sexism infringed upon female development. The critics by expanded, keen analyses support their theses well.

Minrose C. Gwin's sympathetic treatment of Margaret Walker's *Jubilee* shows well how she adapted folk traditions in this story of a foremother Vyry. The essay reveals how the book celebrates the "human community," and shows the compassion and "black humanism" of the main character who by her forgiveness of the white "mistress" offers a real model of reconciliation between women of both races.

Ann Petry's novel *The Street* is credited for its complex and distinct creation in two essays, one by Bernard Bell and the other by Pryse. Bell analyzes how Petry's use of naturalism debunks the myths of the progressive city and the innocent rural town. Pryse tells of the main character Lutie Johnson aspiring to follow Ben Franklin's ethic, but who is not awake to the stigma of race placed upon her by members of the white society. Pryse especially credits Petry's use of a deistic framework in the book to accomplish the de-mythologizing.

Other essays concentrate on Toni Morrison, and two contemporary writers, Paule Marshall and Toni Cade Bambara. Thelma T. Shinn discusses Octavia Butler's science fiction tales as interrelated in their depiction of black women using power but with compassion. The black women mentors teach others the proper exercise of such power.

Two capstone essays end this landmark anthology. Christian's essay emphasizes the achievements of the foremothers, showing that their work was mainly written for white audiences. She indicates the shift that comes with Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maud Martha* and the work of Zora Neale Hurston. Writers following these two write for a black community of readers, even as they thematically stress the interrelationship of sexism and racism. Works in the seventies and eighties stress a women's culture as needed for self-understanding. Christian states that styles vary, but common themes are community responsibility, survival, and the possibilities of healing.

Finally, Spiller spells out the implications of these essays for ethnic studies scholars. In this sense, the anthology is outstanding for the directions it suggests. The community of black women fictionalists is a "community conscious of itself," sharing a "thematic synonymity." The essay leads us to see the vital need for redefining tradition and eliminating the exclusivity resulting from canon "fable-making." These writers have no allegiance to any literary hierarchy. The essays dovetail and in so doing strengthen the aims of the anthology.

Spiller's words provide us with a statement of hope for the future of

American literature and society. One cannot read these essays and not be moved by their significance in a society where mutual respect could support us all as individuals in our searches for self-understanding.

—Cortland Auser  
Bronx Community College

**Maria Estes Sanchez. *Chicana Poetry: A Critical Approach to an Emerging Literature*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 377 pp., \$35.00; \$10.95 paper.**

Sanchez's reason for writing this book was to "contribute to an emerging body of literature that traditionally has had no voice in dominant academic discourse, . . . [and to work] toward an understanding of the ambiguities suggested in the identities of the Chicano Scholar and the Chicana Feminist." There is no question that the author has been successful.

The book contains detailed analyses of some of the works of four of the most prominent Chicana poets today: Alma Villanueva, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Lucha Corpi, and Bernice Zamora. A better selection of poets could not have been made. Sanchez stated that these poets were chosen because "their work dramatically demonstrates the range of socio-cultural positionings that make up the label Chicano." Because each of the poets hails from a different locale in the Southwest, thus having been exposed to entirely different, albeit related, cultural experiences, the author was successful in providing a wide cross section of the Chicana experience. Also particularly noteworthy in this regard were the differences in the linguistic styles of the poets. Some of the works were entirely in English, some in Spanish (translations were provided), and others contained a blending in various degrees of the two languages. This is appropriate insofar as most Chicanos in their language usage fall somewhere along this continuum.

The work appropriately begins with a description of the emergence of both Chicano and Chicana literature and carefully illustrates the differences between the two as well as some of the reasons for these differences. The chapter continues to illustrate some of the major contrasts between this style and some of the more traditional styles of Anglo literature. It is through these sociocultural descriptions that one is able to understand and appreciate the unique position in which the Chicana finds herself, trying to exist both in a Chicano and an Anglo world. The author continues these sociocultural descriptions in each of the chapters that follow, relating them to the works of the various included poets. A true understanding of the Chicana experience would